

Introduction – Who I am; Importance of their work in spreading the gospel. The purpose of this study – an overview of 1st century church history, looking specifically at Paul’s letters written during the time frame of the book of Acts (AD 30-62). Dates are taken from Zondervan NIV Study Bible – Don’t think of these dates as absolute but a framework. Our structure will be the chapters of Acts with attention paid to Paul’s journeys and his life.

Chapter 1 – Before the ascension of Jesus, Jesus tells the apostles (v4) to wait in Jerusalem; that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit; and (v8) that they would be His witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Chapter 2 – The Holy Spirit comes and enables the apostles and Peter to use the keys of the kingdom Jesus had promised in Matthew 16:18-19. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit and stating everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Then He tells them how to “call on the name of the Lord” – repent and be baptized every one of you.

Note that later in Acts 22:16 Ananias tells Paul to arise and be baptized, calling on his name. Paul himself quotes the passage from Joel 2 in Romans 10:9-13 when talking about our confession of faith in Jesus.

Chapter 3 – Peter heals a lame man

Chapter 4 – Peter and John called before the Sanhedrin and refuse to stop talking about Jesus; believers share their possessions; Barnabas (from Cyprus) sells a field and gives the proceeds to the apostles.

Chapter 5 – Ananias and Saphira lie to the Holy Spirit and die; the apostles perform miracles and are jailed, freed by an angel and called before the Sanhedrin and flogged; never stopped proclaiming the good news.

Chapter 6 – First big problem involved taking care of widows; problem solved by appointing 7 men (deacons?) to handle the issue. Among the 7 were Stephen and Philip the evangelist.

Chapter 7 - Stephen before the Sanhedrin; stoned and participants left their coats with a young man named Saul.

Chapter 8 – great persecution; all except apostles scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and Saul destroying the church. We don’t know exactly how long before this persecution began – study bible places this about **35 AD**. Philip in Samaria (how miraculous gifts of Holy Spirit are given) and with the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Chapter 9 – The conversion of Saul (probably about 35 or 36 AD). Sees Jesus – goes into Damascus; Ananias sent to him. Preaches in the synagogues (v20) that Jesus is the son of God [which he learned when Jesus appeared to him]. Peter travels around (Judea) – in Joppa raises Dorcas from the dead.

Chapter 10 – Cornelius and his household converted.

Chapter 11 – Peter explains his actions in Jerusalem – the believers accept that God is accepting the Gentiles. Those scattered spread the word wherever they went – Antioch (3rd largest city in Roman empire) – and also began Speaking to Gentiles. The apostles send Barnabas to Antioch (v22) (300 mi north); and goes to Tarsus (80 mi NW) and gets Saul. They met with the church there for a whole year and taught great numbers of people (v26). Disciples called Christians - The church is spreading as Jesus intended. Antioch church sends famine relief to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 12 – Herod had James the brother of John put to death. Herod has Peter arrested but he is miraculously delivered in the night. He goes to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark then to another place. Herod goes to Caesarea where he meets with people of Tyre and Sidon. **Herod dies in Caesarea in A.D. 44** when he did not give God the glory. Saul and Barnabas return from Jerusalem to Antioch with John Mark.

1st Missionary Journey – Acts 13-15 (AD 46-48)

Chapter 13 – Many prophets and teachers there including Simon called Niger – Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul and church sends them out. John Mark included in their party. Cyprus first destination – According to 4:36 Barnabas was a native of Cyprus – from here on Saul is called Paul.

Sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where John left them and returned to Jerusalem. This event is significant for the rest of Acts and we'll track his relationship with Paul.

Overland to Antioch where Paul preaches in the synagogue (his normal habit). He explains that Jesus is a descendent of David, that he was killed by the Jewish leaders and raised from the dead in fulfillment of OT prophecy. Some Jews believe and a number of gentiles also. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. Jews become jealous and stirred up persecution.

Chapter 14 – to Iconium – The pattern continued with Paul going to the synagogue first. Paul and Barnabas perform many signs. A great number of Jews and gentiles believe but unbelievers stir up persecution with threat of stoning.

At Lystra Paul heals a lame man – they are at first thought of as gods – later the crowd turns and Paul is stoned and left for dead. He survives and the next day leaves for Derbe.

At Derbe, they win a large number of disciples. Then they begin their return journey retracing their path through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. They strengthen the converts and appoint elders in each church (V23) [how were they able to do this in such a short time?]. After they preached in Perga, they returned to Antioch by ship. They reported all God had done through them and stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Chapter 15 – Not really part of the first journey but an interlude before the 2nd. Some people from Jerusalem came down and were teaching that Gentile converts they must be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas debate them and then they go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders. Pharisees said gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Peter said when he first preached to gentiles he was not given any such teaching. James agreed and suggested they send a letter to this effect. With the letter they also sent two men Judas and Silas to confirm the letter.

Also, at the end of chapter 15 Paul wants to go back and see how the churches they had established were doing. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them but Paul refused, because he had deserted them on the first trip. So, they split up with Paul taking Silas; and Barnabas taking John Mark and going to Cyprus.

Galatians – I'm putting Galatians here because the subject is the same as that of the meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15, i.e. do Gentile Christians have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

There are two theories on when Galatians was written.

The North Galatian Theory – This older view holds that the letter was addressed to churches in north central Asia minor. It is held that Paul visited that area on his second journey (though not mentioned in Acts), and that the letter was written from Ephesus or Macedonia during or after Paul's 2nd missionary journey between 53 and 57 A.D.

The South Galatian Theory – Galatians was written to churches in southern Galatia Paul had founded on his first mission journey. If so it could have been Paul's earliest letter, written from Syrian Antioch before the Jerusalem council.

2nd Missionary Journey – Acts 16-18 (AD 49-52)

This trip began in Antioch with Paul and Silas traveling through Derbe and Lystra (picking up Timothy). They traveled throughout Galatia, following the Spirit's guidance as to where not to go. In Troas Paul sees a vision of a man in Macedonia asking for his help – he decides to go there. As they leave, notice the author begins to use the phrase "we" implying Luke is with them. They preach first preach in Phillipi, where persecution causes them to move on.

Their next stop is Thessalonica and after that Berea. Leaving Titus and Timothy Paul travels on to Athens. After staying there for a short time, he travels on to Corinth where he stays for at least a year and a half (18:11).

I&II Thessalonians are thought to have been written from Corinth on Paul's 2nd journey based on the following.

Acts 17:1 "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews." Paul and his companions (Silas & Timothy) travel from Philippi to Thessalonica where Paul preaches. After some time, jealous Jews stir up a mob.

Acts 17:10 "The brothers[a] immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue." – after a while the Jews from Thessalonica come to Berea and force him from there also.

Acts 17:14-15 "Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed." So; Silas and Timothy remain at Berea while Paul travels to Athens, but as soon as he gets there he sends back to Berea for them.

In Acts we are told Paul preaches in Athens for a while with mixed results, then goes on to Corinth. In Acts, there is no mention of whether Silas and Timothy catch up in Athens. Let's see what Acts, and I & II Thess say about Corinth. First Paul works to support himself with Priscilla and Acquilla (18:3). They were there because emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (**AD 49**). Then Acts 18:5 tells us "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

I Thess. 1:1 tells us that the letter is from Paul, Silas and Timothy so they are with him while he is writing the letter.

I Thess. 2:1-2 mentions that they had come to Thessalonica after having suffered in Philippi, which fits in with the account in Acts. Chapter two continues with a description of his work with them and how much he wants to see them again.

I Thess. 3:1-2 says "Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker[a] in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,". So . . . Paul chose to be left alone in Athens and sent Timothy back to strengthen and encourage them. (Since Silas is not mentioned it is speculated that Silas may have gone back to Philippi while Timothy went to Thessalonica).

I Thess. 3:6-7 says "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long

to see us, as we long to see you— ⁷ for this reason, brothers,^[a] in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith..

Therefore Timothy must have gone back to Thessalonica from Athens while Paul went on to Corinth, and then the letter was written when he and Silas joined up with Paul in Corinth.

The second letter is thought to have been about 6 months later in response to further information about the church there. There would have been plenty of time for Paul to write two letters from Corinth since he was there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). This concludes the letters Paul wrote on his 2nd Journey. **Also 18:12 has Galio as Proconsul which historically was from 51-52 AD.** When Paul leaves Corinth, he sets sail for Syria with Priscilla and Acquilla; makes a short stop at Ephesus; goes to Caesarea, then Antioch.

3rd Missionary Journey – Acts 19-21 (AD 53-57)

Again for the 3rd journey we'll take a general look at places visited and how Acts and the letters fit in with I Corinthians being written from Ephesus, II Corinthians from Macedonia, and Romans from Corinth (or possibly Cenchreae). In chapter 19 Paul travels overland from Antioch to Ephesus. He teaches for 3 months in the synagogue then 2 years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus so that all the residents of Asia heard the word.

Acts 19:21-22 tells us “²¹ Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” - Then there is a riot in Ephesus.

Acts 20:1-6 tells us where he goes after Ephesus. After those verses we'll discuss letters Paul wrote on this journey. “After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. ² When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. ³ There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews^[a] as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. ⁵ These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, ⁶ but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.”

I & II Corinthians – These letters are believed to have been written from Ephesus and Macedonia respectively on Paul's second journey.

I Cor 16:1-4 Paul mentions a collection being taken up for the church in Jerusalem.

I Cor 16:5-9 After I go through Macedonia I will come to you. But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost.

I Cor 16:19-20 Paul sends greetings from province of Asia and Priscilla and Aquilla.

As we have read, Paul follows through on his plans. He goes through Macedonia to Greece (Achaia) where he stayed three months, then began the return journey by going back through Macedonia.

II Cor 2:12-13 agrees with the account of Paul's travels told in Acts – "12 When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, 13 my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia."

II Cor 7:5-7 "For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more."

There are no other references to where Paul has gone in II Cor. However II Cor. 8 talks about how the churches in Macedonia had given liberally to the contribution for the saints in Jerusalem. So . . . it makes sense to think II Corinthians was written there.

Romans – Romans is thought to have been written after Paul had continued to Corinth.

Romans 15:23-28 "23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. 28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected,^[a] I will leave for Spain by way of you.

After leaving Achaia Paul goes back through Macedonia; then to Troas where Eutychus is raised from the dead. He sails down to Meletus where he calls for the Ephesian elders. After that (chapter 21) he sails and lands at Tyre, heading for Jerusalem. He then stops at Caesarea and on to Jerusalem. At Jerusalem he is persuaded to join with some other Jewish Christians and goes to the Temple. After about 7 days he was arrested in the temple and had to be rescued by the Roman commander.

Trials (57), defenses, travel to Rome and Imprisonment (AD 60-62)

Chapter 22 – Paul defends himself to the crowd; tells the story again of his conversion. Verse 16 Ananias tells Paul to arise and be baptized and **wash away your sins, calling on his name**. Paul reveals to the Roman commander (tribune) he is a Roman citizen.

Chapter 23 – Paul defends himself before the Jewish council – talks of the resurrection. A group of more than 40 Jews plot to kill Paul the next time he comes before the Jews. The tribune sends Paul to Caesarea to Felix.

Chapter 24 – Paul before Felix who makes no decision. Leaves Paul in prison for 2 years till he is replaced by Festus. History tells us that in **AD 59-60 Felix was recalled to Rome**.

Chapter 25 – Paul before Festus; is forced to appeal to Caesar. Paul to go before Agrippa.

Chapter 26 – Paul before Agrippa

Chapter 27-28 Trip to Rome including shipwreck ends with Acts 28:30-31 “He lived there two whole years at his own expense,^[a] and welcomed all who came to him,³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

The Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) - All of these letters are assumed to have been written during this time period.

Paul describes himself as a prisoner in one way or another in each of these epistles. For example in Philippians 1:12-13 Paul says “I want you to know, brothers,^[a] that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard^[b] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.” Paul rejoiced because of the opportunities he had due to his imprisonment. The whole imperial guard learned of Jesus – how else could that have happened?

Geographically Philippi was in Macedonia (northern Greece) while Ephesus and Colossae were both in Asia minor (modern Day Turkey).

A quick review of Philemon reminds us that that letter was written to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave of Philemon whom Paul had converted. Also, in chapter 4 of Colossians verse 9, we learn that Onesimus was a Colossian. So Philemon must have been in Colossae as well. These pieces of information make me wonder if these the epistles (Eph, Col, Philemon) might have been written at the same time. Let’s look at some text to see.

Both Ephesians and Colossians were sent with Tychicus. Eph 6:21-22 “So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may

know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.” Col 4:7-8 reads almost exactly the same. These passages would make us think they were sent at the same time. Also the list of those sending greetings from Rome to the church at Colossae, and to the Christian Philemon are virtually identical. This would make me think that three of the four prison epistles were written at the same time and delivered by the same person.

Ephesians may have been a circular letter. Col 4:16 says “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.” If Ephesians was a circular letter, Paul could be referring to that letter here.

Let’s read Col 4:10-14 to tie up one loose end from earlier in Acts – “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.”

Let’s notice that one of the people mentioned as sending greetings along with Paul is – Mark (John Mark). The same person Paul refused to take along on his second Journey. Mark is also mentioned in II Tim 4:11 where Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark with him because “he is very useful to me”. There has to be a lesson or two about how we deal with differences, or even failures. . . .

Conclusion – I have tried to show how 10 of Paul’s letters fit in with the history of the church during the time period of Acts (30-62 AD). Galatians was written some time after Paul’s 1st journey or maybe even after the 2nd. I & II Thessalonians were written on the 2nd journey from Corinth. I Corinthians was written from Ephesus, II Corinthians from Macedonia, Romans from Corinth – all on the 3rd journey. Finally 4 letters were written from prison in Rome – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

I hope this will help in your understanding of the New Testament in general, and these epistles in particular.